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## SERMON XXIV.

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### THE BIBLE AND PANTHEISM.\*

Behold I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.—REVELATION iii. 20.

EVERYTHING which God has made he treats according to the nature he has given it. Willing it to be, he respects its essential attributes, and concedes to it its own sphere. This he must do or each thing would either cease to be, or to be that thing. Take the smallest particle of matter. It enters into the conception and definition of this that it occupies space. This prerogative it must assert and vindicate to itself or cease to be. A crystal ground to powder would cease to be a crystal, and in thus grinding it its nature as a crystal would be wholly ignored.

But in governing matter God does not thus ignore any essential property. All physical problems he works out under physical conditions, and it would be an imputation upon his wisdom to suppose that mere omnipotence must be called in to

\* Baccalaureate Sermon, delivered at Williamstown, Mass.

break down those conditions in order to the successful working of such problems. It belongs to our conception of the divine perfection that God should be able to govern his physical universe in accordance with the properties which he has himself bestowed. Accordingly, if we ascertain the essential properties of any material thing with which God begins to deal, we shall find that it will be through those properties, and not by ignoring or destroying them, that he will work out his purposes.

And what is thus true of matter that has properties, is also true of persons that have will and freedom and rights. Here the problems are higher. Grand and complex as are the problems connected with matter, taking hold as they do on infinity and eternity, unsolved, and apparently unsolvable by science, they are as nothing compared with those that arise in the government of beings conscious, free and responsible. And if in solving physical problems God always works under the physical conditions implied in the nature he has given, we may be sure that in solving moral problems he will not disregard any right, nor trench on any original endowment or prerogative on which such right is based. We may be sure that here too his purposes will be wrought out through the fullest exercise of those very prerogatives and endowments in which the problems originated.

Does God then govern man as responsible? Is responsibility the one element without which moral government could not be? Then we have only to ascertain what the conditions of responsibility are, and we may be sure that they will be held inviolate by Him.

And here we say that the one condition of responsibility is the power of rational choice. I do not say freedom, because that is ambiguous. Freedom is a condition, but that is involved in this power of choice. This is the central power in our personality, the point of moral responsibility. In this, all processes of the soul that precede it and pass into outward activity culminate. All that precedes this is spontaneous, irresponsible, subjective. All that succeeds this is but its projection into outward act, and its being mirrored there. In a true life, in all moral life as God sees it, the outward act is but the reflection and image of the inward choice. Without this power we cannot conceive that a moral nature should be brought into activity. We may, and must be constantly affected by events, as the rising of the sun, that have no relation to our choice, but we cannot feel responsible for them; and if God begins to govern us as responsible, we should, as has been said, anticipate with certainty that no crisis or emergency could arise in which he would not hold every condition of responsibility sacred. The point of harmony between the divine omnipotence and the divine wisdom

is that the omnipotence creates the conditions of every problem, physical and moral, and that the wisdom works within and under those conditions.

The statements thus made are signally confirmed and illustrated in the text. In this we have the grandest possible recognition of the fact, and the sacredness of this power of choice. In it we see Omnipotence arresting itself before a prerogative of feeble humanity. Him who styles himself the "Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending, which is, and was, and is to come, the Almighty;" even Him, and that, too, when he would reach the highest result of his labors and sufferings, do we hear saying, "Behold I stand at the door and knock."

Under human government each man has his own sphere to which he has a right. It is a maxim of English law that a man's house is his castle. Within this nor curiosity, nor caprice, nor malice may intrude. Unless in the interest of the state, and armed with the authority of law, no one may enter unbidden. This is his home, it is his own. Bating crime he has a right to do in it as he pleases. He has a right to its exclusion and privacy, and if any one would enter, he must stand at the door and knock.

And so, under divine government, there is a deeper and more intimate sphere of the thoughts and affections and sympathies and choices. This is the true sanctuary of our nature, where are celebrated the nuptials of the soul with its chosen good, and which is known only to the man himself and to God. Into this even God himself does not come except with freest consent. When he would enter here, he does not merge the attributes of the moral Governor in those of the Creator and Proprietor, but, respecting the constitution he has given, he says, "Behold I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

What then have we here? Have we not a prerogative that makes man independent of God? So it seems to some, and hence they hesitate to claim for it the entireness implied in the text. Let us then inquire after those limitations and conditions by which this prerogative is harmonized with the divine government.

And first. The power of choice is limited by endowments and capacities. A brute cannot choose between books, or statues, or pictures, or steam-engines, because it has no capacity to know them as such. A man cannot choose between walking and flying. One born blind cannot choose between sight and touch. But capacities and endowments, both in kind and degree, are wholly in the hand of God.

Again, with given capacities there is a limitation to choice in

the objects presented. These as adapted to man, it was for God to create or not as it pleased him. In providing for physical wants and gratifications he might have held forever the orange and the melon and the peach in his creative capacity. The present variety is soley of his goodness. And so the objects and range of the desires and affections were provided and meted out by him. For the race, and on the whole, God may have created objects suited to meet every want, and to draw out every capacity. No doubt he has, but the limitation of choice through the objects presented is specially noticeable in his dealings with individuals. From birth, sex, education, health, the structure of society, the objects within the scope of individual choice are greatly limited and infinitely diversified. The objects of desire are numberless, of choice but few. Who of us has had it presented to his choice whether he would be President of the United States, or be worth a million of dollars? Capacities and opportunities seem thrown together promiscuously. Capacity often lacks opportunity, opportunity waits for capacity. All this God orders as seemeth him good. In this is much of his providential discipline, and through it his creatures are governed.

Again, choice is limited not only by capacity and the objects presented, but also by the time within which they are presented. Sometimes the time is long. "The long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah," a hundred and twenty years. Sometimes the opportunity is given but for one bright moment and passes forever. In the history of every life, and in relation to every interest, there are periods within which the choice must be made on which those interests turn. There comes a last and decisive moment. After that the offer is withdrawn; the door is shut; the harvest is past; the opportunity is gone, and will return no more. This element of time God holds in his sovereign hand, abbreviating or extending as he pleases the period of choice.

Capacities, objects, time—controlling these God hedges choice within certain limits. Still, if we admit of plenary freedom within those limits, it may be said that we have an element if not irreducible under the divine government, yet capable of so setting itself against the will of God that that will shall not be done. And so we have; and the will of God is not done. If that will were done, there would be no sin; if that will were done, why did our Saviour command us to pray that it might be done? It is the one great characteristic of this world, controlling all its moral and physical phenomena, that the will of God is not done in it. For what did Christ come, for what do his ministers labor, and the church pray, and the Holy Spirit strive, but that the will of God may be done? No, my hearers, the will of God is not done.

But if not, how is he omnipotent? Is it not said that "he do-

eth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth?" Here we need the distinction, made on a former occasion, between choice and volition, or between will as choice and will as volition. The choice of God is free, his volition is omnipotent. As volition, the will of God is always done, as choice it is not. His choice is indicated by his commands. If these do not indicate choice there is no meaning in words, there is no sincerity in God. The opposite doctrine would be monstrous. No man will dare to say that there is not indicated by his commands, a choice of God which the Bible calls will. But choice in itself, or as expressed in command, has no efficiency. It abides in the mind choosing, and a choice in the mind of God has no more efficiency beyond himself than a choice in any other mind. The choice of man, followed by his volition, originates that future for which he is responsible; and the choice of God, followed by his volition, and only then, originates that future for which, so far as we may apply the term to Him, He is responsible. Omnipotence pertains to the volition of God, freedom to his choice. To the volition of man, omnipotence does not pertain, but to his choice freedom does. Omnipotence may create a being with the power of rational choice, and fix the conditions under which choice may be made; but it must then stand in abeyance while that being is governed by laws to which omnipotence has no relation. It is not implied in an infinite attribute that it can perform contradictions. Omnipotence cannot know the number of square feet in infinite space. Omnipotence cannot give solidity to thought or to time. By definition where a hill is, a valley cannot be; and so, where omnipotent will is exerted as volition, finite choice cannot be. If we make the ocean fluid by definition, then God cannot govern it by congealing it into ice by his omnipotence, for it would no longer be the ocean. And he does not so govern it. No. He respects that condition of fluidity by which it is the ocean. He permits it to heave and toss, and assay its utmost; he lets its billows assault the heavens, and wreck navies, and thunder upon the shore; and it is then, at the very moment when the tempest is wildest, and those billows are mightiest, that he says, "hitherto shalt thou come but no farther, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed." And so, respecting perfectly that power of rational choice which makes him man, does He govern man? "*He stilleth the noise of the seas, and the tumult of the people.*" It is the glory of his government, not that this earth and these heavens are marshaled by omnipotence in an order that is faultless, but that he so governs a universe of free intelligences without trenching upon their freedom, that the glory of the physical heavens shall be as nothing compared with that moral glory which shall illustrate forever in results of unspeakable beauty and joy, his wisdom, his justice and his grace.

But can such results be reached by God through the choice of his creatures with no control by him except through the above limitations? No. Whatever may have been true originally, we fail to reach, through these limitations, a full conception of the dependence of a *sinner* upon God.

As a sinner, man must be wholly dependent upon God for forgiveness. Forgiveness is God's act, and must rest with him. Grace must be free, or it would not be grace, and as free, it must be sovereign.

As a sinner *dead in trespasses and sins*, man must also be dependent on God for quickening. His death is not one of mere negation, requiring omnipotence to originate a new mode of being, but a death of chosen and intense activity in trespassing and sinning. So intense is this death, so absorbing the activity in it, that left to itself it would go on forever. Hence the necessity of positive interposition on the part of God, and, in connection with that, of the doctrines of grace. Hence the necessity that Christ should stand at the door and knock.

What, then, is this knocking? In its broadest sense it consists of every influence that addresses man's higher nature, and tends to bring him into right relations to God. Christianity is a great redemptive and remedial system. Under it, not only is a way of salvation opened for those who may, of their own accord, choose to enter, but there is also provided a system of means and influences to bring men to enter into that way. It is, indeed, for this that the world stands. The end of this world is not, as some seem to think, progress—the boasted and hackneyed progress of this age—progress, and an ultimate state of high civilization, or even of millennial perfection and glory for that portion of the race that may then live. No. Christianity respects the whole race with its myriads from the beginning, and its object is to bring together in one permanent community, and with surroundings corresponding with their moral character, all who have affinity with each other through the love of God. To this end God weaves the bright lines of his beneficence into the web of his providence. Suffering all nations to walk in their own ways, he yet does not leave himself without witness in that he does good, and gives them rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness. To this end he revealed himself to patriarchs and prophets. To this end Christ came, and taught, and suffered, and died, and rose again. To this end the Holy Spirit, in his powerful and special influences, is given. And now, throughout this whole system, whether under what is called providence or grace, whatever ought to appeal to the moral nature of man, and, with his co-operation, would lead or fit him to be a member of the great family of God, is God's voice, as, in the person of Christ, and

under a mediatorial system, he stands at the door of man's heart and knocks.

In the call implied in this knocking, two things are required, just those that respect the two great crises in the spiritual history of every Christian. One is that he should hear the voice of the Saviour ; the other that he should open the door.

For the most part, men are engrossed in the things of time. So intense and exclusive is their devotion to them, that their insensibility to the things of the Spirit is, as I have said, characterized by inspiration as death. Seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not. Now it is an era in any life when this engrossment and limitation of thought are broken up, and the powers of the world to come assert their claims. Before, the man saw only the river on which he seemed to be sailing ; now he sees the ocean, and feels the ground-swell of a mightier movement than that of time. Now the Saviour knocks, and hearing, he hears. He hears his voice.

And now comes the second great crisis in his spiritual history. Can he, will he open the door ?

That he can in the proper sense of that word is implied in the fact that Christ knocks. If he do indeed knock, then to argue the question of ability is an impeachment of his sincerity.

But if he can, and do not choose to do it, can God so knock as to bring him thus to choose ? Can God, without infringing upon the prerogatives of choice, cause all choices to be coincident with his ? We think he can. The term omnipotence we do not regard as applicable here, because moral results must be reached by moral causes, and within the sphere of freedom ; but yet we do not believe that God has let loose a power which is either in itself, or in its results, beyond his prevision and control. We prefer to say that the limit of his interposition has been from the beginning, and is now, not the limit of his resources, but one imposed by his infinite wisdom. What do we know of the possible modes of interaction between spirit and spirit ? Between the Infinite spirit and finite spirits ? What do we mean by the drawings of divine love—the drawing of the Father ? What by the power of the Holy Ghost ? These cannot be physical. Omnipotence cannot be predicated of them, and yet, if God so please, they may be made as adequate within their sphere as omnipotence is in its sphere. God can come to his creatures, and can manifest himself to them and in them ineffably. He can work in them "*to will*" as well as "*to do*," and yet such working may not be, it is not, a limitation of freedom ; it is its purification and exaltation to that point where it reaches the certainty and the security of heaven. It may be effectual, and yet of all that pertains to it God may be able to say, "Behold I stand at the door and knock."

It is now, my dear friends of the Graduating Class, thirty years, longer than any of you have lived, since I commenced with a Class, as President of this College, that general course of instruction which is completed to-day. Since that time, with two exceptions, one from sickness, and one from absence in Europe, I have met every class as I now meet you, and have given them my parting instructions and blessing. In stating this, I wish to record my grateful and adoring sense of the goodness of God to myself and to the College. Especially would I do this with reference to higher results than those of mental training. Such results we have sought, and God has not withheld them. In other respects the period has been, and is now, one of inadequate means, and of struggle.

No one can be more sensible than I am of the imperfection of what has been done, and yet there is large room for congratulation and thanksgiving. The Classes of these thirty years have numbered more than twelve hundred men; and of this large number it is with great thankfulness that I am able to say that few, very few, have not made for themselves an honorable record, while many have been greatly useful and distinguished. My first class numbered seventeen, of whom twelve are still living. Of these, one is President of a college, and one a Judge of the Supreme Court of the United States; while, of the five who have died, one gave his life in battle at the head of his regiment in the service of his country. Of my second class, numbering twenty-three, one is a Judge of the Supreme Court of this State, and a Trustee of the College; one is Lieutenant Governor of the State of Illinois; one is editor of the chief paper of one of the most intelligent and active bodies of Christians in the land; one is Professor in a Medical College, and two have been members of their State Senate. These classes furnished thirteen ministers of the gospel. I need not go further. As a body the men of these classes have been, and are, instinct with the spirit of our institutions. In the day of darkness they rushed to their defence, and now, seeking to diffuse universally, and to combine intelligence, freedom and Christianity, they are everywhere throughout this great country, strengthening the foundations, and seeking to realize the highest conceptions of a Christian State; while numbers of them are on the other side of the globe preaching the gospel to the heathen. It is with pride that I point to them to-day as the fruit of that wise system of education which seeks, through our colleges, to render the highest advantages accessible to all; and challenging scrutiny, I ask the country to show the same number of men trained in any other way, of whom fewer have failed, or of whom a larger number have done as good service.

It is, my friends, the ranks of these men that you are now to

join. You have done well with us. Pleasant, and I trust profitable, have been the hours we have spent together. We shall remember you, you will remember us, with affection. You go with our blessing. Go, and "show yourselves men." In all that does honor to humanity, and that brings glory to its Creator, I charge you be not behind the foremost of those who have gone before you.

But while I do this, I have a special charge for you as educated men, and in connection with the text and subject to which we have now attended. It is as the basis of such a charge that that text has been chosen, and that subject has been discussed.

You are entering life at a period when the thought of the world, so far as it separates itself from the Bible, tends towards pantheism. Modern infidelity has various names and forms, but the substance is that; and under whatever form, it is sure to chill and dwarf man, and disintegrate society. Of old, with the uniformities of nature unknown, and her forces unsubdued, pantheism was impossible. The tendency then was to polytheism, and idolatry, and superstition. But as science advanced, and that sense of uniformity which has been called the scientific instinct, prevailed, pantheism became possible. Going in the direction opposite to polytheism, and not accepting one personal God, this is the last term which a mind alien from God can reach, and which, without the Bible, it is sure to reach. Polytheism, idolatry, superstition, on the one hand; or pantheism on the other, I regard as inevitable for man without the direct revelation and recognition of a personal God. Against both these the Bible guards equally and marvelously. Its denunciation of idolatry could not be more contemptuous and terrific; its antagonism to pantheism and all in affinity with it, could not be more absolute. During the height and pressure of the first tendency it was the Bible alone that preserved in the world the knowledge of the one God, with such attributes as to make him a worthy object of worship; and it is the Bible alone that now holds men back from pantheism.

Of pantheism as a system the mass of the people as yet know nothing, and for it they care nothing; but, through conversation, the press, the lecture, the tendency reaches them, coming in like a mist, and affecting, chilling, deoxygenizing their whole atmosphere of thought. It comes in two forms, with different origin, but similar result. Beginning at the lowest point and working up, the pantheism of Natural Science is reached, which attributes all things to principles, and laws, and to *development*. Of this man is the highest result and expression. This is the heathenism of science, and is just as much opposed to the religion and God of the Bible as the polytheism of old, or as fetishism is now. Beginning, on the other hand, with God, and working

down, a metaphysical, or theological pantheism is reached, that, either from the difficulty of conceiving of creation, or under the guise of exalting God, merges all things in him. It makes God virtually the only being, and his will the only will. But it matters little whether you make God everything, or everything God ; whether you destroy the freedom of something called God in exalting man, or the freedom of man in exalting God. In either case, instead of freedom, with responsibility, and moral government, the majesty of a personal God, the beauty of holiness and the joy of willing obedience, you have a system of blind tendencies and dead uniformities ; or, under the name of will, of an iron and remorseless fatalism.

Against both these you are to be guarded, against both to guard others, and both your shield and weapon will be found in that revelation which God makes of himself in Christ, and in the attitude towards man which he assumes in the text. "Behold *I*—." Ah, that word *I*, that little word! Nature does not know it. Except through man, pantheism does not know it ; in its high sense fatalism does not know it ; positivism does not know it. Behold *I*—. Who? "Immanuel, God with us." Not from works now, not from laws, blind laws bringing all things alike to all, not by inferences do we know God ; but, both descending to our weakness, and meeting our wants, He stands before us, "God manifest in the flesh." This is the highest expression of personality which it is possible God should give. This will hold men to their moorings when nothing else could. If God has appeared "in fashion as a man" and spoken to us, to doubt his personality is no longer possible. Thus has he appeared and spoken.

And not only has he thus affirmed his own personality, but in saying, "Behold *I stand at the door and knock*," he recognizes the distinct personality of others, and all the conditions of responsibility. Everywhere the Bible asserts the distinct personality and supremacy of God ; everywhere the separate agency and responsibility of man. These are the truths to be received. Settle as you please, or not at all, let others settle as they please, or not at all, the questions that grow out of a transmitted life, of an inherited nature, of the relations of spirit to matter, and of the finite to the infinite, questions about which the Bible never troubles itself at all, but hold you fast to a personal God, a Father in heaven, and to his supremacy ; and also to a realm of freedom and supernatural power wide as his works, and as much grander than they as spirit is higher than matter. You cannot reconcile the two. Then let the legitimate supremacy of the practical nature assert itself, and with entire faith act on both. This must you often do in life. Often, with limited capacity, must your whole rational nature demand that you should act

upon facts well authenticated, though seemingly discrepant, without waiting to reconcile them.

Finding rest then either in full comprehension, or in rational faith, with such a God above you, with a cloud of witnesses around you, with your freedom of choice respected even by omnipotent power, with the love that is in Christ taking, in its higher sphere, the place of omnipotence in that which is lower, your whole nature is met. It only remains for you to choose for yourselves what guidance and companionship you will have. What I desire for you all, the one thing, is the guidance and companionship of Him who offers himself to you in the text. These words are for the race. "If *any man* hear my voice." You, my friends, need not, you cannot fight the battles that are before you—the battles of life, and the battle with death,—alone. It is the one great fact of our human life that its Giver and Lord offers himself to us in a form in which we can apprehend him not merely for redemption, but for help and guidance, for companionship and sympathy. In taking our nature upon him he has come near to us; having been tempted he knows how to succor us; in him "are hid," for us "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." And now, as you look out upon life, full of interests so precious, and forward to the future life, with issues so momentous, He, the Saviour of men, offers himself to you. With infinite tenderness he stands at the door of your hearts and knocks. O, open the door. Open it fully. In this is all your wisdom. Open the door, and He will come in to you, and will sup with you, and you with Him.

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## SERMON XXV.

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### THE OBLIGATION OF A SKILLFUL DIVISION AND FAITHFUL APPLICATION OF THE WORD OF TRUTH.

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"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."—2 Tim. ii. 15.

A DIVINE Revelation was never given to man, in order to save him the trouble of thinking. The great object is, to enlighten the mind, and direct its faculties, not at all to supersede its most

vigorous exercise. Without a revelation, it is true, that no effort of the human mind would ever arrive at an adequate knowledge of the plan of salvation ; but with a revelation, it is also true, that no man will become an enlightened and efficient Christian without reflection and study.

It may not be necessary that every Christian should be able to give a connected view of the whole system of revealed theology, or answer all the captious objections that ungodly men shall urge against it ; for the love of God shed abroad in the heart, and the teaching of the Holy Ghost, will lead to the conscientious discharge of religious obligation, in the practical concerns of common life, without it. But it is necessary that some, and especially every gospel minister, should be able to do this ; nor is there any subject, where a greater variety of sanctified talent, more patient investigation, and intense thought, are required, than for the successful illustration, defence, and application of the doctrines and duties of Christianity. Jesus Christ requires of every one of his ambassadors that he "be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convince gainsayers." "In meekness, instructing those that oppose themselves." "To show forth sound speech, that cannot be condemned," and thus, "by manifestations of the truth, to commend himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God." And to meet this demand he must PRAY MUCH, and STUDY MUCH, and THINK MUCH. He is bound to conform in all things to the Bible ; but that bond imposes no fetters upon the intellect.

The text decides for the gospel minister *what* he shall preach, and *how* he shall preach ; and bids him bring up all the faculties of his mind, and the affections of his heart, to the performance of the duty. "STUDY to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH."

It is difficult, by any translation, to give the full force of this apostolic charge. The expression, "rightly dividing," is, in the original, a word which bears an allusion to the method of dividing and distributing the portions of the sacrificial victims, according to the nice and scrupulous direction of the ceremonial law. The priest was required not only to divide the body of the victim, in a particularly specified manner, but also to distribute the various portions, in accordance with their divinely appointed purposes. And the force of the direction—"STUDY to show thyself approved unto God"—may perhaps be more fully felt by referring to the use of the same original word in other parts of the Bible. In this same epistle, under the grief of desertion by his former friends, and with the terrors of martyrdom in full view, Paul gives vent to the earnest desire of his heart, that Timothy would hasten his coming to him in the use

of this very form of expression, and which is translated, "*Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me.*" Peter, when he would urge the Christian to make the highest efforts for the salvation of his soul, uses the same word, which is thus expressed in our version: "Wherefore, my brethren, *give diligence*, to make your calling and election sure." And then, again, Paul to the Thessalonians: "But we brethren being taken from you a short time in presence, not in heart, *endeavored the more abundantly* to see your face with great desire." The application of this word in these different places plainly marks the force of its signification; that the full and highest efforts of the whole man are to be put in requisition for the accomplishment of a given object. Referring the whole, then, to the duties of the sacred office, it implies the *necessity*, while it enforces the *obligation*—*to exert every faculty in the skilful division, and faithful application of the word of truth.*

The *necessity* of this exertion arises from the difficulty of thus dividing and applying the word of truth, and the *obligation* arises from the magnitude of the results. The whole design, therefore, will be accomplished by showing—

I. What it is rightly to divide the word of truth.

II. The important results which it produces.

In showing, *what it is rightly to divide the word of truth*, I remark:

1. It is requisite that the whole truth should be presented. No minister is allowed to divide some part of the word of God that may be more pleasing to himself or to some of his hearers, from other portions not as congenial to the feelings, and dwell upon the one to the exclusion of the other. A separation of divine truth that consigns one portion to perpetual silence, is any thing rather than *rightly* dividing it.

In the great system of doctrines and duties which the Bible contains, there is nothing superfluous; and it is a direct impeachment of the wisdom of his sovereign, when, for any reason, the ambassador suppresses a part of his message; for, if God had not seen it to be important, its wisdom would certainly have withholden the superfluous portion. Every revealed doctrine, every duty, plainly expressed or plainly inferred, he is bound to inculcate; and by every motive of hope or fear, of tenderness or terror, which the Bible discloses, to press them upon the heart and conscience of his hearers. How does he know, so long as one impenitent sinner remains in his congregation, that a neglected doctrine is not the very one which should reach his heart and save his soul? How can he know but the endless wailings of some lost soul shall thus become the eternal monument of his unfaithful ministry.

It is in vain, in this day of light and inquiry, for any minister of any denomination to hope that he shall maintain the cordial respect of his hearers by keeping back the most searching truths of God's word in accommodation to their desires of carnal security. God has thrown the light of his revelation too strongly around those doctrines which humble the pride of man and agitate a guilty conscience, to permit them to lie in darkness by their studied exclusion from any minister's pulpit. They stand out; they are too prominent to be overlooked, but at the conscious expense of the preacher's fidelity. The love of ease may prompt a sinner to praise the man who has "prophesied smooth things" to his soul; but in heart that very sinner feels that this man has been faithful neither to *himself*, his *Bible*, or his *God*. So deeply has the finger of heaven engraven these truths upon the tables of his word, and so strongly impressed an answering counterpart upon human consciousness, that they cannot be always overlooked and forgotten. God has explicitly told man what he *is* and what he *must* be, or perish: and he knew all the consequences of proclaiming this when he put it into the commission of his ambassadors; but he laid all the weight of his authority upon them, notwithstanding, to preach it plainly, "whether men would hear or whether they would forbear." Never may the gospel minister *thus* divide the word of truth—preach one portion and reject another.

2. *There must be an accurate discrimination in preaching the truth.*

Those truths which relate to God and Christ, holiness and sin, heaven and hell, are harmoniously combined in one general system; but each still retaining its own identity, and possessing its own distinct characteristics. The mind ought to possess a clear comprehension of the whole through a separate examination of its distinct portions. It should be able to take out one part and examine it abstractedly, and see its nature, its proportions, its tendencies, and then to put it back into the system and see its adaptation to its place and the relation it bears to the whole. Like some skilful artist, who is competent to take his machinery apart, and put it together again. The want of this is the fruitful source of much obscure and unprofitable preaching.

The great doctrines of man's depravity, and dependence, and accountability—of God's sovereignty, and governmental authority—of the atonement by Jesus Christ, and its application through the faith of the believer, by the Holy Ghost—can never be clearly explained, and skilfully applied, without understanding both their individual properties, and their mutual relation to each other. These doctrines bear directly upon those principles of our moral nature which we *feel*; they stand connected with the good man's prayers and hopes, and the sinner's fears

and remorse ; and the preacher ought to know *when*, and *how*, to bring them down, with all their weight, upon the moral sensibilities of his hearers. When he tells them of their depravity, it must be in such a manner that they feel it *theirs*, and that he is describing *them*. When he preaches repentance, there must be something more than the mere name. He must show its nature, its necessity, its obligation, and with so much point and discrimination as shall oblige the sinner to feel, that without it he *must* perish not only, but that he *ought* to die. And when he speaks of dependence, or preaches immediate obligation, let it always be done in such a manner that despondency shall be excluded on the one hand and presumption on the other.

What gave to Jesus Christ and his apostles such power over the conscience? Why was it, that they so surely hit the mark they aimed at? Oh! it was because they knew which arrow of divine truth to select. With an accuracy of discrimination they chose the proper weapon for the occasion, and so used it that their hearers always felt it—the Christian's heart thrilled with joy—the sinner's conscience was stung with remorse. God lays the same instruments *now* before his ministers, and they must learn their nature and their use, or they can never wield them skillfully or successfully.

### 3. *The truth of God must be kept distinct from the wisdom of man.*

If a minister wishes to speculate, let it be in his study, but let him keep his pulpit altogether ignorant of it. Even in reading the word of God, a thousand subjects, fruitful in speculation, may present themselves to a fanciful mind, but which common sense, and especially ardent piety, at once forbid should be agitated in the house of worship. There may be a *right* and a *wrong* in relation to them ; they may be capable of proof or refutation ; but after all the labor and ingenuity of the discussion, no Christian's heart has been warmed, and no sinner's conscience touched by it. Immortal souls have been pressing down the broad way to perdition, unchecked and unalarmed by it all. It is not vain philosophy—not rash, or curious speculation—but the plain truth of God, which edifies a Christian, and brings a sinner humbled to the foot of the cross.

Equally necessary is it, to keep the word of truth unobscured by gaudy ornaments of style, or profusion of glittering imagery. This is disgusting to good taste, as well as destructive to all salutary impression. Truth is to be preached, “not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth.” The plain, simple, direct language of the Bible is always a good model for its commissioned ambassadors. The *sentiment* is made clear ; the *thought* is held out distinct and prominent ; and the manifest design of every word that is used, and every

figure of speech that is selected, is to exhibit the *sense* effectually and explicitly. No matter how earnest the preacher is, no matter how deep and strong the sacred feelings of his heart, or the real eloquence that this glow of soul shall transfuse into all his sermons, but let it not be of that false and sickly nature which comes from the polish of a period, at the expense of plain truth—scattering flowers in the sinner's broad pathway to perdition, when it should be aiming its blows directly at his heart. Oh! a misguided minister may for this purpose waste his strength at the midnight lamp, and thus charm and delight his audience; but without plain, direct, honest dealing with the conscience, he will continue to address an unawakened and an unsanctified people.

4. *He must keep the truth distinct from himself.*

There is danger to a minister, man as he is, "of like passions with others," that something of himself—that which relates neither to God, or the souls of men, but which is entirely selfish, should mingle with his preaching, and thus exclude or obscure the truth.

He is sent with a message, which he knows is unwelcome to many of his hearers, and he is bound to declare it so plainly, that even those who hate it shall feel its personal application. He must lay the humbling doctrines of the gospel upon the pride and sensitive self-complacency of the moralist and the self-righteous, and point them to the dust at the foot of the cross, among penitent publicans and sinners, as the only place of *their* salvation. He must carry the prohibition of Almighty God to the man of pleasure or ambition, and lay it, with all its awful penalties, in the very pathway to his gratifications. The long-cherished hopes of the self-deceiver must be beaten down, and the specious garb of the hypocrite torn off. Often must those very objects, on which he knows the affections of some of his hearers are the most strongly fixed, meet his unsparing rebuke, and unqualified reprobation; and then, when he knows that the odium of the message is often thrown back upon the messenger; oh! there is danger lest the selfish desire of popularity, or the chilling fear of hate and scorn, should throw their palsying influence over him, and seal his lips in silence, when the loud voice of warning or rebuke should be uttered. Against the influence of every selfish feeling must he stand guarded. He must learn to separate the word of truth from his own interest; he must keep the sacred treasure a distinct thing from the earthen vessel in which God has placed it, and while he faithfully presents the treasure, let him leave it submissive to his Master, whether men shall honor or dash the vessel that contains it. His business is to bring glory to Christ, not reputation to himself—to gain the consciences and souls, not the mere ap-

pliance of his hearers—to stand behind his subject, and let the truth be seen—to sink himself, and exalt God.

As a messenger of the King of kings, he *may*—he *must* stand far above the fastidiousness, or captious criticism of man; but as a frail, sinful child of the dust, let him always keep *below* the proud aspirations of ambition, and popular applause. Let him in his dying hour be enabled to say—“I have not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God.” “We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants, for Jesus’ sake.”

#### 5. *He must give to the truth an appropriate application.*

Many a sermon, that might have produced a powerful impression on another occasion, has lost all its force, because it was wrongly timed. There are ever varying shades of feeling, and changing circumstances in a congregation, and particular providences, that throw a temporary influence over it, which the minister ought to watch, and adapt his message to the occasion. That kind of preaching which abounds in generalities, aiming at no particular object, and possessing no definiteness of application, which may be preached in one place, and at one time, as well as another, is seldom of much value anywhere. The *place*, and *time*, and *occasion*, must all be consulted.

In regard to *character*, also, the same skilfulness of application is necessary. In every audience there may be discovered a diversity of character. There will usually be found a wide variety of feeling, reaching from the point of warm and holy devotion, down to the most cold and hardened indifference. “Each one must have his portion in due season.” That which is applicable to one, has no direct relevancy, and will probably produce no salutary effect, upon another. If the preacher here deals only in vague and general remarks, and without a distinct delineation of any man’s moral features; just throws over the whole the obscurity of some broad and general description, not a single individual among all his hearers will probably make a salutary application to his own soul of one word that he has uttered.

But let him, from time to time, single out his object and bring the truth, with a definiteness of purpose, and a distinctness of application, to bear full and direct upon it, and somebody feels it. It finds its way to some slumbering conscience—it disturbs some sinner’s carnal security. This skilful application of truth separates the precious from the vile, obliging the conscience to take sides, and determine for itself, whether the man is the friend or the enemy of God. It turns the eye of the sinner in upon himself, and makes him read his moral character, as if alone in the presence of his Maker. He feels that the hand of the preacher has raised his strong hold, and is pulling down his hiding places, and leaving him unsheltered to the righteous retributions of God’s violated law. The clear, emphatic voice of truth cries—“thou art the man.”

All this is necessary to meet the demand of the text, and if any one suppose that it is to be accomplished without much *thought*, and *labor*, and *prayer*, it is the evidence of much ignorance, or overweening self-confidence. The whole man must be given to the important and laborious work of *rightly dividing the word of truth*.

The sacred OBLIGATION to do this, is seen—

**II. In the important results which it produces.**

**1. It alarms the sinner.**

Impenitent sinners are so much absorbed in their attention to "the things that perish," that, if left to the influence of their own propensities and pursuits, they would never wake up, and flee from the wrath to come. Dealing with them at a distance, through labored essays upon the excellence of virtue, or the general odiousness of vice, where timid and feeble appeals, if any at all, are made to the conscience, does not meet the desperate exigencies of their condition. Their immortal souls are soon to lose their hold upon the privileges of probation, and go away into eternity, with all the awful issues of the judgment dependent upon their moral character. With all their frailty and responsibility, they manifest an inherent repugnance to the message of salvation, and even when partially aroused by its light and conviction, tending back again to the slumbers of sin and moral death. Oh! the messenger sent by God to warn them, *must be in earnest*. The solemn and searching declarations of the Bible are the only means he can use to save them; let him determine, therefore, to seek the heart and conscience, and, if possible, to lodge the truth so deeply there, that the soul cannot rest under its pungent application. While it is the effectual working of God's spirit that brings the sinner to submission, let the preacher feel, too, that this is to be expected just in proportion to the plainness and faithfulness with which the truth is applied. That God has fitted it to this end, and given it "his power unto salvation," and made it "as the fire and the hammer which breaketh the rock." Rare indeed is that hard heart to be found, that can remain altogether unaffected when brought directly beneath its mighty influence. And if anything is to reach and rescue the sinner, the plain truth of God, thus pointedly applied by the preacher, and blessed by the Holy Ghost, must do it. Its unyielding claims must be made to follow him up from one hiding place to another, till he yields the weapons of his rebellion, and bows in allegiance to his rightful sovereign.

**2. It points the convicted sinner to a Saviour.**

The full and clear exhibition of the doctrines of the gospel is the only method of setting before the sinner his *remedy*, as well as his *danger*. Jesus Christ must be presented as the centre of

the great system of gospel truth, and all the lines of direction turned towards, and meeting in his atoning sacrifice. This is the only preaching that can ever meet the sinner's wants, or minister to the sinner's safety. The heart of the most deeply convicted man is still "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked," and unless the plain doctrines of the cross be kept distinctly before him, he will, most assuredly, run off into some one of the ten thousand by-paths which lead downwards from the way of life, and, dying, leave his blood on the skirts of that unfaithful watchman who neglected to warn and guide him. He must preach plain truth, and deal with souls in solemn earnestness ; and while trembling under the deep conviction of their sin, *they* cry—"Men and brethren, what shall we do to be saved?" he must be ready to give the explicit answer—"Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world."

#### 3- It reaches the hiding place of the deceiver.

We may be cautious as we will in the reception of members to the church of Christ, but such is the deceitfulness of the human heart, and such the impossibility for mortal eyes to read its secret character, that the self-deceiver and the hypocrite will get within the fold. There is reason to fear that all our churches contain some, perhaps many, to whom the judge, at the last day, will say—"Depart from me, I never knew you."

But dark as is the concealment in which the character of the heart is often veiled from the eye of man, the preacher has always the opportunity of bringing the searching light of divine truth to shine in upon this darkness. It is his duty to do it often. With all the clearness of the inspired word, let the features of *true religion be delineated as distinguished from all counterfeits*—let him tell, from the Bible, how a renewed heart *must* feel and a renewed man *must act*; and let him put the touchstone round to every member's conscience, and self-deception is undeceived and hypocrisy unmasked. The truth becomes "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart," and by it many a mask is torn off and many a false refuge pulled down.

#### 4. It reclaims the backslider.

Oh! how often have we occasion to heave the sigh over the returning coldness and indifference of those whose glowing zeal seemed once so quenchless! How often—to apply the apostrophe of the affectionate apostle—"ye did run well, who did hinder you?" Many begin fair, and with glowing love and zeal in the cause of Christ, "run well" for a season. But alas! a returning absorption in the business and pursuits of the world throws its chilling influence over them, and the warmth and glow of spiritual life seems well nigh extinct. A faithful and affectionate pastor weeps over their sad condition, and grieves under the discouragement of their withering example.

But thanks to God, if they are the real children of his grace, he hath put within his word an influence to thaw and melt their frozen hearts—a power that shall rouse them from their guilty slumbers. *And he will do it*—but oh! it may be by laying his heavy hand upon them, and smiting the heart with so deep an affliction that it shall throb for life. The truth *will* come home, but the chastising stroke of the rod may make way for it. God has said “woe to those who are at ease in Zion,” and the *woe denounced* may soon be to them *the woe executed*. The minister of the Lord Jesus Christ is bound to great faithfulness on this point. He must use the word of God with a plainness and distinctness of application which shall reach the object. Let him set before them their violated vows—their broken covenant—their destructive influence—the awful doubt which hangs over a once hopeful experience—and the dishonor done to Him whose holy name they bear; and, under the blessing of Almighty God, he shall have the satisfaction to see them return with weeping, confession, and renewed dedication to the Saviour. The sheep that had strayed away, and long wandered upon the mountains, shall thus be found and borne back rejoicing.

##### 5. It makes decided, practical Christians.

So far as preaching can minister to the establishment of the Christian, it is in presenting the word of truth plainly and applying it faithfully. From the cares and toils, and perhaps trials of the week, he takes his seat in the sanctuary on the Sabbath to be fed with the bread of eternal life. The preacher sets before him the plain doctrines and duties of the Bible—warms his heart by the clear illustration of the truth as it is in Jesus—cheers his soul by some distinct delineation of that “hope which is set before him in the gospel”—and throws the light, and life and joy of salvation all around him in the bright illumination of some precious promise of his Saviour; and oh! from that consecrated place the holy man goes home refreshed, comforted, strengthened, “able to give a reason for the hope that is in him,” and testifying that—however it may have been with *others*—the Sabbath has been *his* delight, and the sanctuary, *to him*, “the gate of heaven.” Oh! I had rather hold this privilege of thus “feeding the church of God” than to sit at the treasury of nations: I had rather be blessed with the opportunity of thus dispensing the glad hopes and promises of the gospel to those who love them than to hold kingdoms in my gift and crowns and thrones at my disposal.

Here the meek and humble Christian, from the plain, serious, faithful preaching of the gospel, gains clear apprehensions of truth and duty—becomes “mighty in the scriptures”—receives a directing, quickening, sanctifying influence; and thus, “strong in the Lord and in the power of his might,” he lives a *decided*

Christian—a *practical* Christian a *happy* Christian—the faithful minister's "star in his crown of rejoicing."

#### REFLECTIONS.

1. The minister of the gospel should feel his own, and his hearers' dependence upon the Holy Ghost.

Let the church or the ministry renounce their entire dependence upon the spirit of God, and the day of revivals has gone by—the glory is departed—the gospel, with all its aptitude to move and melt the human heart, is powerless. So "fully set in them to do evil," are the hearts of the children of men, that with all their powers of free agency—their obligations and their opportunities—they "will not come to Christ that they might have life."

The preacher needs this divine influence to enlighten an otherwise darkened understanding, and warm an otherwise cold heart. Talent, and learning, and eloquence, are all in vain in his great work, without the help of God. He will prove but "a blind leader of the blind." When Paul planted and Apollos watered, God must give the increase; and much more in the decay of primitive zeal and faithfulness is the necessity of this holy influence manifest.

The people need this influence. Without it, no matter how great may be the zeal and earnestness of the preacher; how glowing his descriptions; or how warm and tender his entreaties and expostulations, they will *certainly*, but as *freely* as certainly, resist the truth, and go down to death their own destroyers. Let, then, neither preacher or hearer ever separate the word of divine truth from the Holy Ghost, who inspired and applies it.

2. The preacher should feel, that the truth he delivers is as applicable to himself as to his hearers.

God has not sent angels to bear the tidings of peace and pardon to a ruined world. He has put this commission into the hands of those who lie under the same condemnation as the men to whom they bear it. They are bound by the same authority—amenable to the same tribunal—and dependent upon the same grace. Dying men, preach to dying men. How unseemly! how revolting it is! if the preacher appears to stand apart from his hearers; and, elevating himself above them, speak the promises, or proclaim the threatenings of the Bible, as if from a sphere without, and beyond, their personal application.

When, then, the preacher goes forth to this great work, and bears the message of his Master to dying men, let him always feel that his own eternal interests are involved in the reception of the same offers he bears to them; and that his own salvation

depends upon a hearty compliance with the self-same terms of mercy. This will spread its influence over all his ministry. It will infuse a softening influence through all his appeals and warnings. Every subject will then be invested with the importance and earnestness of a kindred interest, and a personal application. The realities of the sinner's guilt and danger will then be disclosed with all the melting tenderness of his own deep experience; and the high hopes, and holy joys, of God's redeemed will flow out from a heart that feels, and a soul that glows with the same heavenly aspirations. The deep sincerity of his own emotion sends a softening influence round—arrests attention—and helps to fasten conviction on the conscience. It is the way to "save his own soul and those who hear him."

3. The weighty responsibilities resting upon both the preacher and the hearer of the gospel.

A burden, such as no other creature bears, is laid upon the gospel minister. Undying souls are committed to his charge, and he is required "to watch for them as one that must give account." He will be "a savor of life unto life, or of death unto death" to them all. His influence, either for good or for evil, will be wide-spread, and powerful. Deathless spirits will go off into eternity, bearing the stamp which his hand has put upon them; and the impression will last, unfaded, away beyond the issues of the final judgment.

But this responsibility comes not alone upon the minister. The execution of his official duties imposes corresponding obligations upon his people. They can no more shake off *their* responsibility than he can *his*. If he must *preach*; they must *hear, believe and obey*: and if the day is coming when *he* must give up his account to God, "how he has preached," so the same day will lay the necessity upon *them* to give an account "how they have heard." And let it be remembered, that the *same truth* he is bound to deliver, they are bound to receive. Neither he, nor they, can exercise their own choice in this respect. God has long since settled this whole question, by saying to his ministers—"Go ye into all the world, and preach *the Gospel* to every creature"—and by saying of every hearer—"He that believeth shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." That same gospel, which he must preach, they must believe, or perish. Those feelings which rise up against the preacher, for the plainness of his dealing with your consciences, rest assured, my hearers, strike a higher object, and are directed against a holier Being, than the mortal man whose faithfulness has excited them. God has put his own "mind and will" into his revelation, and it is His authority that will sustain and defend it.

Look onward, then, both pastor and people, to that great day

when there shall come forth the grand developement of all the results of that interesting relation now to be consummated. Before an assembled universe shall the awful issues of that day be awarded, just in proportion to the improvement you make of this solemn relation. Oh! keep that day in view, both you who preach, and those that hear; and may God in his mercy grant, that then shall come to us *all* the welcome admission to the endless glories of his kingdom.

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## SERMON XXVI.

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BY REV. J. M. SHERWOOD, N. Y.

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### THE DEW OF ISRAEL.

"I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon."—HOSEA xiv. 5-7.

THE Classic authors of antiquity are justly admired for their beautiful and sublime imagery. Subjects in themselves mean and unimportant, have been dignified and made attractive to cultivated minds by the power of genius and the aid of language. But the Bible, however despised by an unsanctified literature, is incomparably superior to any human production, both with respect to the dignity, beauty, and sublimity of its thoughts, and the character and importance of the subjects of which it treats. Its moral and intellectual character transcends all other writings. Its conceptions, for holiness, loftiness and grandeur, are nowhere equaled. Its imagery is rich and magnificent beyond comparison; while the intrinsic interest and value of the subject-matter stamps it with an excellence truly divine. Where, in the whole compass of heathen literature, can you find a passage so full of beauty and richness of thought and imagery, and at the same time so instinct with noble lessons of moral truth, as the passage chosen for our present meditations? The heart of man cannot conceive, or the language of man express, a more abundant and glorious display of the divine goodness than the God of Israel here promises. "I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots at Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the

olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall return ; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine : the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon." Let us consider the blessing so largely promised under various metaphors.

I. "I will be as the *dew* unto Israel." The metaphor is simple yet expressive. We cannot fully appreciate it. A temperate climate and frequent rains render the dew comparatively unnecessary to us ; and hence our dews are light, and not much esteemed. But in Palestine, where the sun's rays scorch the earth, and where the rains are periodical and infrequent, the life, beauty, and fertility of the country depended almost entirely upon the dew. And the God of nature has mercifully provided for such regions of the earth copious dews, and at the season when most needed. In ancient times we read that Gideon filled a basin with the dew which fell on a fleece of wool in a single night. And at the present day we are assured, that during the months of June, July and August, a cloud is seldom seen in Palestine, and scarcely a drop of rain descends ; but to supply this deficiency the earth is moistened by nocturnal dews, which are so copious as to resemble small, thick, penetrating rain, and a person exposed to them will soon be wet to the skin.

Hence there is frequent allusion to dews in the Scriptures. The bestowment of the dew is spoken of as a great blessing from God, and the withholding of it a curse and calamity to be dreaded. Isaac, in blessing Jacob, wished him the dew of Israel which fattens the field. And David, in imprecating judgment on the spot where Saul and Jonathan were slain, says : "Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew upon you." The abundant dews preserved and nourished the vegetable kingdom, and made Palestine, in the days of her glory, one of the most beautiful and fruitful countries in the world. The dew being one of the chief natural causes of Palestine's extensive productions and beauty, it was natural that the nation should regard it as among the choicest blessings of Heaven. The Hebrew prophets, too, enriched their instructions with frequent reference to the dew and its effects, and made it a type of the wonderful grace of the gospel. The reviving, fertilizing, and blessed influence of the gospel, and the richness, freeness and abundance of its blessings, are set forth under this figure. By the mouth of his prophet the God of all grace promises to be as the dew unto Israel. By the timely communications of his grace his people shall be kept from decay and barrenness, and made morally beautiful and fruitful. Regular and constant as the laws of nature which fattens their fields, should be the visits of his love and the operations of his grace. Though noiseless and un-

seen in its agency as the dew itself, his spirit should descend upon them with the power of a great and perennial fertility.

And how signally was this promise verified! For many hundred years God was as "the dew unto Israel." He was their refreshment and life. He kept alive their national existence. He made their rocky country as the very garden of the Lord. He did not suffer his people to pine away in their iniquities. Oft-times did they forget his goodness, pervert his blessings, and provoke him to anger; still he bore with them; continued his favor to them; caused the heavens to drop fatness on them, and made them to flourish, while all the world beside was a scene of moral desolation. Literally was the promise of Isaiah performed: "For a small moment have I forsaken thee! but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee saith the Lord thy Redeemer."

But the promise of the text is *general* and God loves to remember it. His heavens are as rich in blessings now as in the day that he so favored Israel. The same sun shines on us to-day that shed his beams on the hills and along the valleys of Judea. And the same Redeemer, whose ceaseless flow of grace and love poured such streams of plenty, and spread such scenes of beauty over that favored land, reigns still in Zion. If we really belong to God's husbandry, and if we keep our minds and hearts open to the influences of the gospel, what the dew was to Israel, God will be to our souls. We shall never be cursed with barrenness. Our spiritual graces shall never decay. This vineyard will always be fresh and green; we shall grow as the lily, and cast forth our roots as Lebanon.

## II. Let us pass to observe the analogy between the Dew of heaven and the grace of the Gospel.

The dew, although little observed, is one of the most interesting and wonderful phenomena in nature. There is a good deal of curious and instructive philosophy in it, simple and common a thing as it is. The benefits of the dew, also, are far greater than is commonly supposed. Without it the earth would lose its fruitfulness and become a desert.

1. There is nothing miraculous in the dew. The exact cause or causes which produce it may not be known, or cannot be scientifically explained; still we believe and know it to be the effect of natural causes. It is produced by the operation of fixed laws in nature. The dew does not drop down mysteriously from the skies every night, according to popular language and the belief of the unlearned; but it is drawn up from the bosom of the earth by some hidden force, or by the state of the atmosphere, and then silently dissipated over the vegetation on the surface of the earth. The agency is unseen, and even mysteri-

ous, yet it is a natural, established agency, and adequate to produce the wonderful effects which we daily witness.

So conversion and sanctification is not a miraculous work. Grace is never arbitrary, and forced in its operations, however sovereign in its modes and subjects. Salvation does not fall down from heaven upon the soul indiscriminately, irrespective of the laws of mind and of divinely appointed agencies. The heart must first be laid open and exposed to the action of the appointed means and influences, or the dew of heaven will not be produced and gathered to it. House your plants, or cover them with a bushel, and the dew will not touch them. So cloister your piety, or hide it under a bushel, and it will pine for the open air, and the wind and sunshine of heaven, and die out for lack of moisture.

2. Divine grace, like the dew, is silent, gentle, and progressive in its operations. How noiseless is the labor of nature in bringing forth this daily blessing to man! Not a leaf is stirred—not a flower is shaken—not a sound is heard—and yet the mighty change is wrought and the effect produced. All night long the wonderful process is going on: the tiny particles of moisture are drawn to the surface and caught up by the atmosphere, and the law of attraction forms them into drops, and silently the moisture falls over the surface of every plant exposed to its touch: and when you walk forth in the morning, myriads of little crystal globes sparkling in the sunbeams attest the powerful action of an unseen hand, while nature has profoundly slumbered in the bosom of night.

Equally noiseless and gentle are God's gracious visits to his people: they are known only by their effects. He comes not in the tempest which rends the mountains and prostrates the trees of Lebanon; nor in the earthquake which rocks the world, and convulses nations, and terrifies men; nor is the fire which illuminates the sky and desolates the earth; nor in the ways of human observation and expectation; nor yet along the line of conspicuous agencies, or by the mouth of mighty trumpets. No. God mercifully hides his power and glory from view, when he draws nigh to his people. He lays aside all that is terrible, and approaches in a way to excite only our confidence and joy. It is rather by the secret voice of his Spirit speaking to the soul, that he communes with his people; it is by gentle and resistless influences insinuating themselves imperceptibly into all our thoughts, and moods, and feelings; it is by unseen and insignificant agencies that do not attract attention, that God ordinarily works in the kingdom of grace. Gently and unobserved by the eye of sense as the dew in all its processes, are the operations of divine grace on the soul. It finds its way to the inmost heart; it penetrates every secret thought, feeling and purpose; it

quickens every grace ; it moves every spring of action ; it reaches the principle of immortal life, and gives it vigor and youth. We cannot see God nor hear his voice ; but we know he is present with us ; our spirits are refreshed ; we are lifted into a higher state of being ; there is a striking deeper of the roots of knowledge, grace and experience in the soul, and a spreading out of the branches of the new life.

Call to mind, Christian, the hour of your conversion. A terrible darkness hung over you. A sense of sin distressed and agitated you. A fearful load of misery and fear lay upon your heart. You felt that you was sinking into despair, and in the height of your distress, it seemed to you that nothing short of a *miracle* could deliver you—nothing less than an audible voice from heaven assure you that you was forgiven. But a *change* passed over you. It was a surprising, a wonderful change. You knew it ; you could not doubt the fact. Though no angel had announced it—no voice whispered it—no vision revealed it—no miracle declared it, yet you *knew* that your sins were forgiven. You felt on your heart the effect of divine grace. Everything without told of a change within. All nature seemed lovely and joyful to you. The heavens shone over you with new glory. You heard sweeter music in the song of the birds, and saw new beauty in every tree and flower. All attraction and beauty seemed to centre in Christ. A peace such as language cannot express, flowed in upon your soul. A joy such as angels feel, filled your heart. And with tearful eyes and bursting emotions you hastened to tell what God had done for your soul.

How gently and sweetly did God come to you in that first visit of his forgiving mercy ! And thus he always comes to his people. We must not seek him or expect him amidst the noise and bustle of the world ; nor in the tumult and excitement of the crowd ; nor along the pathway of *miracles* and stupendous displays of power and glory. But rather must we look for and seek God our Saviour, in the holy quiet of the closet, in the peaceful contemplations of the Sabbath, in the silent and unconscious action of truth on the inner man, in the quiet thoughts of the mind and the heavenly desires of the heart, in the way of ordinary and established means, along the unseen and unobserved channels of the blessed Spirit.

III. God's gentle visits are not only refreshing and adorning to the spirit of piety, but they produce a *sanctified* effect on the heart and life of his people. They increase the depth and scope of their religion and add to their fruitfulness. The dew is indispensable to the earth's fruitfulness, and especially in such countries as Palestine. So the bestowment of divine grace day by day is an essential blessing. It is indispensable to Christian

life, to progress in religion, and to the bringing forth of fruit. Privileges and outward blessings are important in their place; but this alone is *vital*. This touches the very springs of spiritual life. Without this all the sunshine, the culture, and the rich fields of the gospel are in vain. This always produces growth in the divine life. "I will be as the dew unto Israel; he shall grow as the lily and cast forth his roots as Lebanon." Two things are promised under this figure: rapidity of growth, and beauty, firmness and durability of character. The lily of Palestine, we are told, is a noble, fragrant, and most beautiful flower, growing wild and in abundance in the fields and valleys of that once beautiful land. It furnished king Solomon with many of the charming illustrations in his inspired "Song," as well as with graceful ornaments in the fabric and furniture of the temple. It has ever been regarded as the emblem of purity, and when in full bloom is said to afford one of the most beautiful sights in nature. It was to this very flower, unfolding its delicate and magnificent beauty to the sight of his listening hearers, that our Saviour pointed when he affirmed that "Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."

This figure then suggests the rapid growth of the Christian, and the beauty and loveliness of his character when the Spirit of God is imparted to him. His graces are revived and made to shine forth to the world; his sanctified nature is expanded and its principles are invigorated; his habits of piety are confirmed; and his spirit and life made to put on more and more the type of heaven.

But the lily is a transient flower; like the summer glory, it fades quickly away. The promise hence is, that Israel shall not only grow as the lily, but cast forth his roots as Lebanon. Not only come early and quickly to maturity and unfold to view the beauty and excellence of moral purity, but at the same time grow strong and hardy, and put on incorruptibility.

The cedar of Lebanon has ever been regarded as an object of unrivalled grandeur in the vegetable kingdom. It was a favorite image or symbol of the Hebrew prophets to denote things of greatest strength and durability, and kings and potentates of highest rank. It is a large and majestic evergreen. It grows often in Palestine to the height of 100 feet and spreads out its gigantic branches over an immense circumference. As a shade and a shelter it is highly prized, while the wood is remarkable for its beauty, solidity, and incorruptible qualities. A tree of such lofty height and majestic dimensions, crowning the heights of Lebanon, where the winds of heaven assailed it during the lapse of many centuries, it required large and far-reaching roots to sustain it. Beautiful emblem of the real Christian as he abides in Christ! So he towers up above all other men towards

heaven. In the "mountain of the Lord," among "the trees of righteousness," he casts forth his roots in the soil of grace, and pushes out his branches in the sight of all men and unfolds the life of God. Deep down in his soul strike the principles of God's unchanging truth; his union to Christ sends the vital and energizing flow of spiritual life to the utmost extremities of his being, while the grace of God nourishing his faith and hope, and developing his inner life, keeps him always alive and makes him a noble object to look upon. Unlike the frail flower of the field, whose beauty and life quickly perish, the lively Christian perpetuates his verdure and excellence through all changes and seasons; his graces are incorruptible. The drought of summer which withers the frail and delicate beauty of the valley does not affect the glory of Lebanon. So that which often blights the sign and hope of good in a child of this world; that which causes a falling away among false professors, and a decay of zeal among mere enthusiasts, does not destroy the life, nor mar the beauty, nor hinder the growth of a true child of grace. Clouds and darkness gather at times on Lebanon and hide its glory for a season, and the tempest breaks over it, and the cedars tremble and roar in the fury of the mountain blast; but the clouds roll away, and nature is hushed, and the sun again gilds the mountain top, and there the stately cedar still stands, unscathed, serene and majestic as ever, the pride of Lebanon. So the darkness of trying Providences may gather in the sky of the Christian; the winds of adversity may howl amid his branches, and the storm beat long and fearfully; but when the trial is passed, and the sunshine of peace beams on his soul again, the serenity of his look, the sweetness of his temper, the rejoicings of his faith and hope, will prove that he has not been harmed, but remains "steadfast, immovable;" nay the very trial has developed new life and virtue in him; the roots of grace have gone down deeper among the rocks of the everlasting hills; higher has his soul mounted up; deeper and purer has his experience become.

Look at the true Christian when you will—in summer or winter, in times of drought or of revival, in circumstances of trial or prosperity—and he wears the same lovely aspect: his graces possess perennial freshness, and he brings forth every fruit in its season. Such a character, find it where you will, and under ever so forbidding an exterior, is precious in the sight of Heaven, and has a value which is not appreciated on earth.

IV. His branches shall spread and his beauty shall be as the olive tree. We have the stability and gracefulness of the good man's character set forth here under still another figure. The olive tree was the symbol of all that was fresh and graceful, and so valuable was it considered that, from king to cottager, every

landholder had his olive-yard. Nothing could convey to the mind of an Oriental a more expressive image of the beauty and fragrance of Christian character.

The true Christian is the highest style of man. So far as religion moulds and controls the character and life of a man, it tends to make him a perfect and glorious being. True, there are many who profess religion, who are unlovely and repulsive, with nothing in their character to please, or in life to attract ; and the world unfortunately accepts them as specimens of piety. But such unlovely specimens of humanity are rather examples of the *want* of religion, and not examples of its power or genuine fruit. Could we see man as religion is fitted and meant to make him, we should see a beautiful specimen of manhood. Religion *adorns* as well as saves. Religion imparts grace and fragrance as well as strength and virtue. Indeed there is a peculiar grace and dignity in the man who walks with God. The tenderness of feeling, the sweetness of spirit, the carefulness not to injure the meanest creature, the benevolence and sympathy of heart, the glow of piety, and the studious aim to promote the happiness of others, are traits which no mind, however lacking itself, can behold in others without respect and admiration. Like begets like. And the man who holds intimate daily intercourse with God in meditation and prayer, will come to reflect not a little of the beauty and excellence of the Divine mind. What a Divine lustre beamed in the face of Moses when he came down from the mount ! He had seen the Lord, had communed with him face to face, had caught some rays of "the excellent glory," and his face shone like the sun when Israel beheld him. The world took knowledge of the primitive disciples "that they had been with Jesus." Bad as this world is, it is not wholly insensible to the attractions of moral goodness. It cannot fail to mark the superiority of the man of God to other men. His pure example, his winning character, his self-denying and benevolent life are in marked contrast with the vice, the selfishness, and the moral ugliness which he sees elsewhere. So meek, so gentle, so full of kindness and good will to all men is the real Christian that most men will respect his character. Wickedness is often disarmed by his exhibition of goodness, and unbelief is constrained to admit the truth and power of religion. And such is the state of his affections towards God, such his humility, love and obedience, that God himself finds complacency in him. "A meek and quiet spirit is of great price" in his sight.

And the beauty of moral goodness never decays. The olive, too, is an evergreen, and hence never loses its freshness and beauty. In this respect it is a lively emblem of the live Christian, whose graces bloom in perpetual verdure ; they are never so lovely as in a ripe old age ; never so transcendent, so truly

divine, as in the hour of dying ! No matter what changes come over the outward man, or over the face of nature, or upon society around him ; "He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in its season ; his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."

V. Piety is as fragrant as it is beautiful. "His beauty shall be as the olive tree and his smell like Lebanon." Lebanon was not more distinguished for its princely cedars than for its odoriferous vines. The numerous vineyards which adorned the mountain slope and covered the lesser hills perfumed the valleys below and sent their fragrance to a great distance. Beautiful imagery to express one of the effects of grace on the heart of man ! True piety is more fragrant than "the smell of Lebanon." It gathers its sweetness not from earth but from heaven. Its perfume is emitted from the tree of life, from the throne of God, from the breath of angels, and is wafted to earth on the breezes which blow over the paradise of God. That celestial fragrance distills its subtle influence upon the heart and upon the mind of the child of God, and breathes out its sweetness into the conversation, the actions, and into the very looks and manners of a man. There is a heavenly sweetness in the spirit and life of true piety which is both pleasing and grateful to a true moral taste, and at the same time balmy and refreshing to the spirits as the gales of paradise. It is good to be with one whose life is hid with Christ in God ; whose being is subdued, moulded, chastened, adorned and enriched by the grace of God. The life of such an one is from heaven ; his speech is of heaven ; and the power of his attraction draws you towards heaven. You see and feel in his presence that goodness alone is of any real value. And how pleasing is such a soul to God ! How he loves to lavish upon him the dew, the sunshine, and the early and latter rain ! "Awake, O north wind, and come thou south ! blow upon my garden that the spices may flow out."

VI. The crowning blessing of grace is fruitfulness, and this is also promised. "They shall revive as the corn and grow as the vine." The corn and the vine are Scripture symbols of fruitfulness. These in time of drought wear a most unpromising appearance ; they lose their freshness and vigor ; they droop and seem ready to die. But when the clouds drop rain on the parched fields, and the dew returns, how quickly and wonderfully do they revive ! Life and freshness return, and they yield a liberal increase. So the Christian sometimes falls away from his first love and promise. He grows cold in his affections and negligent in his duty. And thus the Spirit of life is grieved away for a season and his soul languishes. All is now a scene of desolation

and decay, and the prospect for the future is dark and dreary. But when "the time of refreshing comes from the presence of the Lord" his soul is among the first to catch the reviving presence and show the blessed effects of the Divine visitation. Now his soul revives like the corn after a drought, and grows as the vine. His Christian graces put on new life, and all is a scene of beauty and verdure and lively interest. And when the time of gathering and of vintage finally comes, there will not be wanting the full corn in the ear, and the rich and ripened grape in numberless clusters.

How rich, how abundant, then, is the promise treasured up in this single Scripture! And it is just the blessing which meets our wants to-day as a church.\* It is a season of drought. The divine influences are suspended. The dew is withheld. The early and the latter rain have not fallen of late. The corn and the vine are in a drooping state, and there is no ingathering of souls.

But the mercy of the Lord is not clean gone forever. The heavens are full of blessing. There is dew and rain and sunshine in glorious abundance treasured in the gospel. Look to God by the eye of faith and the heart of prayer, as in the days that are past, and once more will the clouds drop fatness on this now desolate heritage of God, and we shall, as in those days of blessed remembrance, again "grow as the lily, and cast forth our roots as Lebanon."

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\* Preached by the Author to his people at a time of general declension.